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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 SANTO DOMINGO 007490

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: DOMINICAN ELECTIONS #11: PRD PRIMARY SLIPS TO 2004

REF: A. (A) SANTO DOMINGO 7395 (NOTAL)

[1](#)B. (B) SANTO DOMINGO 7132

[1](#)1. (SBU) Following is number 11 in our Dominican presidential election series:

PRD PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY: SHOW POSTPONED AGAIN, CAST UNCERTAIN

As foreseen in Ref A, President Mejia's three challengers in the PRD presidential primary that had been rescheduled for December 21 pulled out, amid charges that the President had tampered with the party's membership roster and was using public resources to campaign and buy votes. Mejia published a letter December 17 firmly dismissing his three challengers' demand that he quit the race for the PRD nomination (see text below). On December 18, the organizing committee for the primary announced it would be postponed until January 18, and Mejia quickly agreed to the new date. But one of our contacts has confirmed that Mejia's PPH faction decided not to allow the challengers to pool their primary votes against his and or accept a 50-percent-plus-1 majority requirement for the winner, as previously agreed.

These moves sent the challengers -- Vice President Milagros Ortiz-Bosch, Tourism Secretary Rafael "Fello" Subervi, and Emmanuel Esquea -- scrambling for an alternative game plan. Late on November 18 they announced formation of a committee of nine advisers -- three for each pre-candidate -- to devise a method for choosing a single candidate among them. They deferred any reconsideration of their decision not to run in the primary with Mejia. Government-owned daily "Listin Diario" suggested the three might hold their own separate primary. A Subervi adviser told us the three would remain aloof from the Mejia primary and select their own candidate among themselves, based on a polling sample of PRD members. Our contact also suggested Congress might change the electoral law to permit a political party to field more than one presidential candidate.

Subervi met this week with PRD party president Hatuey De Camps, who was nominated by a rump PRD primary December 7 (Ref B). An adviser to Subervi told us an effort was underway to convince De Camps to renounce his own anti-Mejia candidacy and join forces with the three.

Meanwhile, the Central Election Board (JCE) continued meeting daily to decide which of the two primary elections -- De Camps' on December 7 or Mejia's now postponed until January -- was legitimately convened according to the PRD's statutes. The JCE is examining documentation submitted in support of both sides and has publicly promised a decision before Christmas. A rumored possible way out of this politically thorny issue for the JCE judges: Declare both primaries null and void, and force the PRD's scrapping presidential contenders to reconsider their behavior.

The PRD's main foe in the May 16 election, former President Leonel Fernandez (PLD), appeared stronger than ever against the fragmented PRD. A preference poll of the general electorate released December 19 gave him 63 percent versus 15 percent for any PRD candidate including Mejia.

[1](#)2. (U) Following is our informal translation of President Mejia's reply to the three challengers:

(Begin text)

Santo Domingo de Guzman
December 16, 2003

Comrades
Milagros Ortiz Bosch,
Rafael Subervi Bonilla,
Emmanuel Esquea Guerrero,

Distinguished Comrades:

I received and read attentively your communication of yesterday. My decision to opt for the Dominican Revolutionary Party's grass roots and seek the presidential candidacy for the 2004 elections has been the result of my sincere conviction that I have the determination, the popular support and the commitment to govern on behalf of the needy majority of this country, and not exclusively for the minority that has everything.

My aspiration has a legal basis in the General Statutes of the Party, which do not prohibit presidential re-election, and in our Constitution's article 49, which expressly permits it.

Convinced of the democratic practices that our unforgettable leader Dr. Jose Francisco Pena Gomez taught us, I have insisted that the Party's supporters among the people should decide freely, without back-room deals.

Despite the many intemperate attacks against me, in order to show tolerance, democratic spirit and party unity, I reached an agreement with you November 12 to hold a Convention in which you could pool your votes against me -- all against one.

In addition, the agreement requires me to obtain more than 50 percent of the votes, knowing that the General Statutes of the PRD stipulate a simple majority for internal elections.

I also agreed to allow your delegates to the Primary Organizing Committees and the polling sites to be selected individually, even through I knew that they would act in a bloc against my candidacy.

Then I unhesitatingly agreed to your request to postpone the Primary which had originally been scheduled for last Sunday, December 14.

The arguments in your letter focus on the printed membership list for the Primary.

As you will recall, neither I nor my supporters wanted to add new voters to the membership list, but I went along with that to please you.

The checking of the list is an essentially technical task, which should be managed by the responsible and prestigious Primary Organizing Committee. From the beginning I instructed our technicians to cooperate with you on this, with the understanding that the audit of the list was approved by the technical representatives of the pre-candidates and accepted as correct and valid for the primary process. The printing of the membership list in the next few hours will be essential for the primary to be held on Sunday, December 21.

I don't know whether you fully understand the situation of the country: we are faced with a conspiracy of special interest groups that want to block the modernization of our economy, the financial system, the establishment of a social security system, democratization of housing, and equitable distribution of public expenditures: measures that benefit the poor, small account holders, the entire Nation. For this reason they want to oust the PRD, which is the only party that can ensure governability.

It was this entire challenge that led me to run for re-election: If I don't defend the performance of my administration, which is confronting those special interests, no one will defend it.

I'm telling you this because you don't seem to be aware of it.

You've cast the debate in the party in terms of re-election or no re-election, and not in terms of people's real interest: to be able to work, advance, free themselves from the dictates of a powerful minority that wants to enslave them.

You don't appear to understand.

You ask me to renounce my aspirations; but you say not one word about what the country can expect from you to deal with the situation that we face: the continuation of a profoundly unjust society, in which poverty and misery have reached levels incompatible with justice and human dignity.

But you are asking even more of me: that because I'm going to win, I should quit.

This is the strangest request I've ever known.

I will not renounce my legitimate rights as a party member and under the Constitution.

I will not abdicate the responsibility that I have assumed to

my followers in the Party.

I intend to continue fulfilling that responsibility.

You may use whichever PRD membership list you find appropriate.

The most draconian conditions.

The most inequitable rules.

I'll win because the Party and the Dominican people want justice. Against the power elite, they want justice.

My fraternal greetings.

(Signed)
Hipolito Mejia

(End text)

13. (U) Drafted: Bainbridge Cowell.

HERTELL